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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an overview of the philosophical/historical background of moral education in the United States and describes an instructional program developed to teach junior high school students a behavioral strategy for acting ethically. Entitled "Skills for Ethical Action," (SEA), this program was devised in the 1970's to help meet public demand for moral instruction in the public schools. Public interest in moral development in American society stems from the 17th century, when the Company of Massachusetts Bay passed an act which ordered every town to appoint a person to teach children to read and write so they could interpret the Bible and defend themselves from false representations of their Protestant faith. Education in the moral domain has continued to be important in the schools, although the Protestant based value system has gradually given way to non-religious democratic values such as freedom, equality, justice, and respect for human rights. Various recent public opinion polls have concluded that the American public continues to have a strong interest in providing moral instruction for youth. The SEA Program meets this need by focusing largely on a cognitive decision-making approach. When participating in the SEA program, students are directed to reach ethical decisions by a process involving logic and reflection. Major steps in the SEA strategy are identifying the value problem, thinking up action ideas, considering possible effects on self and others, judging, acting, and evaluating. Feedback from participants in SEA programs indicates that students generally report a gain in knowledge about themselves and an increase in learning about the importance of and methods for considering others before acting. In addition, teachers have reported that they notice a positive change in their students in both interpersonal and intraclass relationships. (DB)

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SKILLS FOR ETHICAL ACTION: A RATIONALE

by

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SKILLS FOR ETHICAL ACTION: A RATIONALE

Skills for Ethical Action (SEA) is an instructional program developed by Research for Better Schools, Inc. It is designed to teach junior high school students a behavioral strategy that enables them to act ethically. The purpose of this paper is to provide an explanation of the program and a rationale for its particular approach to moral/ethical/values education.[1] The paper briefly describes the philosophical/historical background of moral education as well as current views vis-a-vis American society. The major portion of the paper examines SEA, its place in the moral education field, its theoretical foundations, and the outcomes anticipated from its particular emphasis. In closing, some questions frequently asked about SEA and moral education are discussed.

Philosophical/Historical Background of Moral Education

The charge to American schools to provide moral education is as new as the 1976 Gallup poll assessing public attitudes toward education. But it is also as old as the "Ould Deluder Satan" Act, passed by the Company of Massachusetts Bay in 1647. This act ordered every town of at least 50 households to appoint a person to teach children to read and write so that they might interpret the Bible for themselves and thus defend themselves

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[1] Hereafter referred to as "moral education." This is done for the sake of writing clarity and also because the term "moral education" is the most commonly used even when education in the areas of ethics and values is being discussed.

against false representations of their Protestant faith. The Act served as a model for the other New England colonies as well (Knight and Hall, 1951, p.62).

The importance of education in the moral domain continued to be emphasized even after the colonies had joined to form the United States of America. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 stated, "Religion, morality and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged" (Knight and Hall, 1951 , p. 116. At the turn of the century, the typical elementary school curriculum included study of the Bible and catechism, in addition to reading, writing, and arithmetic. And a treatise written in 1829 on the art of teaching in the common schools called the teacher a "moral agent." It stated that one of the teacher's first objectives should be to cultivate virtuous habits in the students for "the cultivation of virtuous propensities is more important to children than even their intellectual culture" (Knight and Hall, 1951, p. 408.)

The latter part of the nineteenth century, however, brought social and economic changes in the United States which challenged the place of moral education in the public schools. The post-Civil War growth in industrialization led to massive waves of immigration. Many of the new immigrants came from Catholic countries in southern and eastern Europe, bringing with them not only a different religious viewpoint, but a somewhat different set of values as well. They objected to schools that exposed their children to moral education which was blatantly Protestant in

origin and expression, and they began to establish schools of their own. This move alarmed the country's political leadership who saw the public schools as one of the primary means of socializing the newcomers and fitting them into the American mold. So the role of the school in moral education was deemphasized and a system of values thought to be basic to a democratic society and common to major religious faiths -- freedom, equality, justice, and respect for human rights -- gradually replaced the Protestant-based value system in the public schools (Greenbaum, 1974, pp. 417-418; Purpel and Ryan, 1976, pp. 3-4).

Current Views of Moral Education vis-a-vis American Society

These basic democratic values have become the basis for citizenship courses in public schools and appear in the public speeches of persons representing all facets of the political scene. Recently they were publicly reaffirmed by our thirty-ninth President. In his inaugural address, President Carter promised to implement policies that reflect the values of freedom, equality, justice, and respect for human rights -- policies that will affirm "our nation's continuing moral strength" (The New York Times, 1977, p. B1).

But even though these values are accepted by most members of our present-day pluralistic society, concern has been expressed about the way they have been taught in the public schools. Throughout the first half of this century, the most common educational method was that of indoctrination. Children were taught that these were the values of every good American and therefore were to be accepted without question.

Two major problems have been identified with this approach to moral education. First, it didn't work, as indicated by events of the sixties and early seventies. The civil rights struggle, the Vietnam War, and the Watergate scandal all raised moral issues which citizens found themselves unprepared to handle.

Secondly, there is a growing point of view that indoctrination -- defined by Litke as "closing people's minds to things that should be open" -- is of itself immoral. Closing people's minds curtails rationality and thus may reduce their ability to be autonomous. Reducing their ability to be autonomous may be considered as a form of assault (Litke, 1974, p. 87).

If the basic values of our society are not to be indoctrinated into our youth, then what form should moral education take? In recent years a number of educators, psychologists, theologians, and philosophers have begun to answer this question by first describing what is meant by "morality" in contemporary terms. A moral person is not simply one who has learned a set of externally prescribed principles and who acts according to a given moral code. Rather, the moral person is one who has learned to make his or her own reasoned decisions regarding moral issues and is disposed to act in accordance with these decisions. Such persons are said to be morally autonomous. They can interpret basic moral principles, such as impartiality, freedom, consideration of interests, and respect for persons, in the light of the situation they are in. They are capable of envisioning the social consequences of their actions and of modifying their behavior accordingly. They are not closed off from the ideas of their society,

but they know that the ultimate decisions for their actions are their own and they realize that they themselves are responsible for their acts. Moral autonomy does not mean that the person no longer adheres to basic moral principles. Rather, persons who are morally autonomous have, to use Peters' (1970, p. 45) words, "gotten on the inside" of these principles. They see them as signposts which help to point out those aspects of a situation that are morally relevant. Thus the principles come to function as motives for action.

Given this contemporary view of morality, it would seem then that one fundamental aim of moral education would be to help persons to develop in such a way that they are morally autonomous. Programs developed to further this aim would seek to promote the personal acceptance of autonomy and the exercise of individual capacity to be an agent rather than a passive reactor. As an outcome of completing a program of this kind, persons would accept moral responsibility for themselves and would have moral principles that they developed out of their own experience.[2]

Moral education programs that would produce such an outcome would seem to be acceptable to educators and parents as well as to experts in child development. A poll conducted in 1975 among Phi Delta Kappa members asked its respondents to define "a moral person." Given seven definitions, 97 percent of the respondents checked "shows genuine concern about the rights

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[2]Further discussion of moral autonomy and its implications for moral education may be found in the following documents: Gustafson, 1970; Peters, 1970; Rich, 1968; and Wilson, Williams and Sugarman, 1967.

and welfare of others"; 89 percent checked "thinks clearly about issues of right and wrong"; and 71 percent checked "obeys the dictates of his own conscience" (Ryan and Thomspon, 1975, p. 603). A 1975 survey of teachers and parents of junior high school students in public schools across the country indicated that both groups were in favor of moral education programs which would focus on the values of self-respect and self-knowledge (necessary ingredients for autonomy) and the value of consideration for others (Sanders and Wallace, 1975, p. 7).

These same values appear in a list, compiled in 1975 by a group of child development experts, of the ten characteristics most important to the total development of children. The list included such items as self-esteem, self-confidence, sensitivity and positive responsiveness to others, clarity of values, assumption of responsibility for behavior, autonomy, and social interaction skills (Huebner, 1977, p. 577).

A concern for educational programs that would promote moral autonomy and consideration of others is reflected in the objectives for citizenship education listed by the National Assessment for Educational Progress. Of the ten objectives, five are clearly related to moral education:

1. Show concern for the well-being of others
2. Support rights and freedoms of all individuals
3. Approach civic decisions rationally
4. Take responsibility for their own development
5. Help and respect their families (Johnson, 1975, p. 45).

The importance of moral education in the public schools is also evident in the educational goals presented by the various states. Of forty-two State Departments of Education having at least working drafts of public school educational goals in 1975, thirty-six (86 percent) had at least one goal in the moral domain. These goals included such statements as:

- "Develops a reasoned commitment to the values that sustain a free society" (Connecticut)
- "Possess an understanding of and respect for himself -- his abilities, interests, values, aspirations, limitations, and uses this understanding to set personal goals" (Georgia)
- "Accepts the responsibility of preserving the rights and property of others" (Georgia)
- "Clarify his basic values and develop a commitment to act upon these values within the framwork of his rights and responsibilities as a participant in a democratic process" (Washington)
- "Must foster development of the skills of creative and critical thinking to enable students to deal effectively with situations and problems which are new to his experience in ways which encourage him to think and act in an independent, self-fulfilling and responsible manner" (Michigan)
- "To develop an understanding and concern for the rights and needs of others" (Delaware)

(Cited in Sanders and Klafter, 1975, pp. 14-26.)

The survey of junior high school teachers and parents cited earlier also showed that both groups felt that present efforts at moral education in the schools were inadequate. Some believed that moral education should be taught as a specific course. Other recommended that it be integrated into the present curriculum (Sanders and Wallace, 1975, p. 7). This concern for moral education in the schools was echoed in the results of the "Seventh Annual Gallup Poll of Public Attitudes Toward Education" compiled in 1975. In this survey 84 percent of the parents of public school children favored instruction in the schools that would deal with morals and moral behavior (Gallup, 1975, p. 234).

Skills for Ethical Action's Place in Moral Education

In recent years, partly because of the expressed public concern for moral instruction, literature in the field of moral education has multiplied to the point where it now includes literally thousands of articles, books, and other documents. In order to provide background for the conceptual development of the Skills for Ethical Action (SEA) program, much of this material was collected, reviewed, and classified by the staff at Research for Better Schools, Inc.[3] In the classification process, a number of different theoretical positions were identified, four of which were considered to be major influences. These major positions or approaches are: values (Kirschenbaum, 1976; Raths, Harmin, and Simon, 1966; Rokeach,

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[3]An additional result of this effort was a bibliography (Klafter and Wallace, 1976) containing over 1800 citations of materials published between 1960 and 1975.

1973; Rucker, Arnspiger, and Brodbeck, 1969; Silver, 1975); cognitive developmental (Kohlberg, 1975); cognitive social learning (Bandura, 1974; Burton, 1976; Staub, 1975); and cognitive decision making (Coombs, in press; Peters, 1970; Wilson, Williams and Sugarman, 1967).

Most of these theoretical approaches have had some measure of influence on either the concepts or the activities of the SEA program. In fact, one reviewer of SEA (Meyer, 1975, p. 2) has termed its approach as "eclectic." However, the basic concepts of SEA come primarily from the cognitive decision-making approach to moral education.

This approach grows out of ethical philosophy where both the process of decision making and the principles involved in reaching decisions are considered in the light of logic and reflection. The rational actor not only must employ a logical process in making decisions about moral actions but also must understand the reasons underlying those decisions. The British moral philosopher R.M. Hare (1973, p. 116) further stated that in order for a moral decision to be rational it must be both universalizable (recognized as good irrespective of who is the subject) and prescriptive (function as a guide to behavior).

Two major proponents of this approach to moral education are Richard S. Peters and John Wilson. Peters (1970, pp. 31-36) has identified certain fundamental principles (impartiality, consideration of interests, freedom, and respect for persons) which can be justified as the basis of rational morality and which sensitize the individual to the morally relevant aspects of a situation. Wilson further amplifies morality by taking into account other essential features such as intention

and acting for good reasons, good reasons being those based on a rational consideration of both self and other people's interests (Wilson, Williams, and Sugarman, 1967, pp. 191-192).

Wilson's concern with what he calls "a phenomenological description of morality" led him to break it down into a number of components which allow for the assessment of moral competence. These components, which Wilson gave short Greek labels, include: an attitude that accepts others' feelings and interests as of equal validity to one's own (PHIL); the ability to know and accurately describe the feelings of self and others (EMP); the mastery of factual knowledge and social skills (GIG); the rational formulation of consistent action-guiding principles relating to the interests of self (PHRON) and relating to the interests of others (DIK); and the ability to put one's principles into action (KRAT). Wilson views the components as qualities and rules of procedure that define a reasoned morality and outline a method for making rational decisions which in turn foster the growth of moral principles. He believes that these components can be treated as skills, abiltities and attitudes which can be developed through educational efforts (Wilson, 1969, pp. 2-8).

The work of both Peters and Wilson has strongly influenced the basic conceptualization of the SEA materials. Three of the key concepts of the course -- self, others, and being fair (described in more detail in a later section) -- were drawn directly from the fundamental principles described by Peters as the basis for morality. The views of Wilson in communicating a rational method for developing principles for moral behavior were

particularly influential in the development of the strategy, as will be evident in the discussions which follow.

The influence on SEA of the educational objective which has grown out of the cognitive decision-making approach is also readily apparent. This objective, as stated by Coombs (in press, p. 1), is "to teach students to make and to act on intelligent or rational decisions about moral issues." The objective of the SEA program is to teach students a process that will enable them to make rational decisions about value problems arising in their own lives and to act on those decisions. This process is a six-step strategy which is the instructional core of the program. The strategy emphasizes the decision as well as the action. The students do not simply choose the action they want to carry out. They are asked to first decide whether it would be the ethical thing to do, basing their judgment on the objective weighing of the information they gathered about the possible consequences of this action to self and others. A detailed description of the ethical action strategy and its relationship to specific theoretical aspects of the program definition of ethical action follows in the next section.

The Ethical Action Strategy

Building the instruction around a strategy reflects the program's position regarding how best to teach students a method for governing their own behavior. This position is similar to that described by Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan (1977, pp. 144-145). It is based on the premise that moral education which emphasizes only moral reasoning is insufficient

because it does not develop in the students patterns of constructive behavior. Unless such patterns are developed, the student is not equipped to handle new moral confrontations as they arise. Moral education must do more than simply help students know what they should do. It must also show students how they should act and provide them with practice in actually doing the actions they decide upon in a moral situation. The SEA program's position is that students must be involved in a process that will offer them a structure by which they logically will proceed toward reasoned actions. The six steps of this process or strategy are described below:

Step 1: Identify the Value Problem

In this step the students describe the situation that presents a problem or that indicates they are not doing enough to show that one of their values is meaningful. They name their value which is involved and then formally state their value problem.

Step 2: Think up Action Ideas

This step asks the students to brainstorm ideas for actions that might help them handle their problem. Then the students check their action ideas to make sure that they are stated specifically and that they are possible for the students to do.

Step 3: Consider Self and Others

In this step the students think about how their action ideas might affect their own values, feelings, health and safety, and possessions. They get information about how others might be affected

in these four areas by these action ideas. The students also think of what the general effects of their actions might be.

Step 4: Judge.

The fourth step asks the students to be objective as they review and summarize the information gathered in Step 3, in order to judge whether their actions would be ethical. They then change or reject those actions which they deem not ethical.

Step 5: Act

In this step the students choose one of their actions they deemed ethical and make a commitment to carry out that action. They are also called upon to persevere until the action is completed.

Step 6: Evaluate

In the final step of the strategy the students examine the action they have completed and ask themselves whether it was indeed ethical. They review how well they used each step of the strategy and consider the importance to them now of the value which they acted upon.

The strategy as a process was designed to meet several criteria. One was that it be impelling and easy to learn. Thus the strategy uses short phrase names in the imperative mood. The labels given the students for the subprocesses or "things to do" for each step are succinct, and each step has three. Further, the steps encompass skills thought to enable moral behavior (Hill, 1975, p. 4).

Process often can imply a mechanistic, impersonal method free of a value stance. Quite obviously, this is not the case in this program. As Hill (1975, p. 2) has written, values are embedded, however subtly, in all instructional programs whether in science, music, or vocational training. Aside from the idea that instruction cannot be value-free, Hare (1973, p. 118) maintains that children cannot be taught abstract moral principles without their also being taught some concrete moral prinicples. He does not view this as indoctrination if the aim is that children should in the end appraise these principles for themselves.

The principles or values of the program are openly stated. The particular values of self, others and being fair or impartial which define the program are ones which have been seen as acceptable to the nation's pluralistic culture and basic to the ideals of democratic societies (Bell, 1976, p. 4). Further, both instructionally and ideologically, the user of the program is required to project and use his/her own values as a guide when working through the strategy. Thus the individual may introduce a wide range of religiously, rationally or phenomenologically based values which are compatible with the prime program values (Hill, 1975, p. 2).

Specific Theoretical Aspects of Skills for Ethical Action

The ethical action strategy is the embodiment of the program definition of "ethical action": "Doing something which you have decided is fair after considering the possible effects on self and others." The four underlined portions of this definition represent the key concepts

of the program and offer a convenient framework for examining the specific theoretical aspects of the SEA materials.

Self. The "self" component of SEA has three dimensions. One is the development of self-knowledge; the second is the ability to think divergently; and the third is a sense of moral autonomy.

Self-knowledge is seen as a necessary part of instruction in ethical action because in order to consider the consequences of a potential action on oneself, one must first know certain things about the self that might be affected. Self-knowledge includes an awareness of and insight into one's feelings, described by Wilson as an essential aspect of the morally competent person (Wilson, Williams and Sugarman, 1967, pp. 192-193), as well as an awareness of one's beliefs and values, which Fenton (1977, p. 5) has stated is necessary for the individual to function effectively. But the component "self" involves more than simply knowing how one feels and what one thinks. A sense of "selfhood" (self-respect or self-esteem) is also very important to moral action. Lickona (1976, p. 19) has called this sense a basic source of consistency in moral behavior. He points out that when a person has a strong and integrated sense of self, that person identifies with his or her own actions. But if one has a weak sense of self, one is able to cheat or lie and not feel guilty about doing so because there is no self-identification with what one has done.

The second dimension of the "self" component is the ability to consider the variety of alternatives which are open to the person in resolving moral issues. It enables the person to visualize the possibilities

of various actions and to deal with problems creatively. This ability is part of what Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan (1977, p. 151) call "moral imagination"; they have stated that its role in moral thinking is of the utmost importance. Allen (1974, p. 55) has called the ability critical in terms of moral growth.

The third dimension of the "self" component, a sense of moral autonomy, has been defined by Kay (1975, p. 360) as the attitude of a person who is able to securely rely on his or her own judgment about moral issues and to reach conclusions independently of external moral guides.

The SEA materials offer the students many opportunities to learn about self along the dimensions described above: selfhood, moral imagination, and autonomy. Early in the program the students are asked to consider their own reasons for wanting to act ethically and to examine the role that caring about others plays in their own lives. They consider what things and qualities are important to them, and they rank a list of general value terms in order of personal significance. In order to get information about how potential actions might affect themselves, they are encouraged to examine what their own feelings might be and to identify those things they do and say which show how they feel.

But perhaps even more important in terms of self-development is the personal application of skills and concepts called for in each SEA lesson. For example, after students have identified a real value problem in their own lives, they are taught a modified brainstorming process which requires

them to generate a wide range of specific things they might actually do to handle that problem. When learning the skills needed to make reasoned decisions, the students are required to make real decisions about the problems they have identified in their own lives, to act on those decisions, and to assess the actual effects of their actions. In so doing, the students have the opportunity to discover that they can indeed make responsible, ethical decisions and put those decisions into action in a way which has mostly positive effects on all the persons involved, including themselves. This experience thus may contribute to both their sense of self-esteem and their sense of moral autonomy.

Others. There is some evidence to suggest that persons who feel good about themselves may be more inclined to engage in behavior which is helpful to others (Staub, 1975, pp. 15-16). But the ethical character requires more than simply helpful behavior. Concern for the effects of one's actions on others is at the heart of moral issues. And the capacity to consider as fully as possible the consequences of one's behavior on others (as well as on oneself) is necessary in order to act ethically. In addition, ethical action involves self-regulation, the ability to curb one's own self-interest out of concern for other people and for the community at large. Therefore an effective program of moral and ethical education must seek to develop, in addition to self-knowledge and self-respect, a knowledge of and respect for the interests and concerns of a wide range of others who may be affected by one's actions.[4]

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[4]These particular aspects of the "others" component have been discussed in depth in recent works: Etzioni, 1976; Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, 1977; Mischel and Mischel, 1976; and Purpel and Ryan, 1976.

There are two abilities needed to obtain the knowledge required for consideration of the consequences of one's actions on others. First, it is necessary to be able to determine and accurately describe how others might feel, or do in fact feel, about a certain action. Second, in order to discover just how another person's interests and concerns might be affected, it is necessary to be able to take that person's role -- to look at the situation from his or her point of view.

The development of knowledge about others and of respect for their interests makes up a large portion of the SEA materials. The students are introduced to role taking as early as the second lesson in the program. The ability to put oneself in another's place is sequentially developed through the four units, with instruction and ample practice in both role enactment and role taking (defined for the students as "role playing in your head"). The students also receive instruction and practice in "people reading" -- determining the feelings of others by observing verbal, non-verbal and situational clues.

The role-taking and people-reading skills are presented as ways of getting information about the consequences of one's actions on the values, feelings, health and safety, and possessions of others. An effort is also made across the program to widen the circle of others who are to be taken into consideration. Initially, the students are asked to consider those immediately affected by what they do -- members of their family or their friends. Gradually, they are encouraged to include less immediate others, such as neighbors or people they meet at school. Then in the final unit,

they are asked also to consider how their actions might affect a wide range of other people -- in their community or even in the nation or the world.

There is some thought, however, that simply knowing how other people might be affected by one's actions is not sufficient for ethical action. It is also necessary that one have a genuine concern for others and give their interests equal consideration with one's own (Wilson, 1969, p. 2; Kay, 1975, p. 360). Wilson (1969, p. 2) has identified both cognitive and affective aspects of this concern. On the cognitive side, it involves the belief that other people have rights that are equal with one's own. On the affective side, it involves a feeling of respect or caring for others.

The SEA program recognizes that simply knowing how others feel is not enough. Therefore, the course seeks to develop an attitude of genuine concern for others which will dispose the students to practice the consideration of others in their daily lives. This is done in two ways. First, the students are presented with the concept of caring. The term is defined as "a real concern for the well-being of others," and it is explained that this concern is what leads one to consider the effects of one's actions on other people. The students are also told that in order to show caring one must stop to think about the consequences of one's actions and then use that information to guide what one does so that the effects are mostly good for everyone. Several activities allow them to experience personally how they feel when they do, and do not, show caring

for others and how a lack of caring may lead to detrimental effects on the selfhood of others.

Secondly, throughout the program the students are required to practice the step of considering how their own potential actions might actually affect other people. There is evidence to suggest that such practice does indeed lead to the development of a caring attitude, particularly if the student is provided with value statements promoting this behavior and is given the opportunity to link what he or she has done to show concern for others with such statements (Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, 1977, p. 158; Staub, 1975, pp. 15-17).

Fairness. The principle of "being fair" is used in a synonomous sense of "equitable" or "impartial." It is not an outcome of a particular action. Rather, it is the practice of giving equal and unbiased consideration to the interests of both self and others when deciding on an action. Without an understanding of, belief in and disposition to act in a way which can be judged "fair," the ability to know the feelings and points of view of others and the attitudes of concern for those others will influence the individual's behavior only in selective or accidental ways.

The conceptual basis for the program interpretation of "being fair" comes primarily out of the works of Wilson and Peters. Wilson (1969, p. 2) calls this attitude PHIL and offers a variety of ways of expressing it such as "regarding other people as equals," "thinking other people's interests count," and "looking on other people as human beings with rights." The definition of "being fair" given the SEA students -- "acting

in a way which shows you believe that all other human beings are of equal worth or value" -- synthesizes Wilson's expression of this component of moral competency.

A prime concern expressed by Wilson, and one which the SEA materials have attempted to deal with, is that a person may believe or profess to believe all others are equal but not act in a manner reflecting this belief. This failure may be the result of not knowing how to implement the belief or may be a result of the person lacking sufficient feeling to impel him/her to act congruently with the belief.

In the SEA program an effort is made to allow for application of this principle. Several complete lessons are devoted to the "being fair" component and it constitutes the major criteria for the Judge step of the program strategy. The definition of "being fair" is explored through modeling and examples from both social and interpersonal viewpoints. Partially to acknowledge the widespread usage of "equal consideration" in dealing with differences, historical and sociological examples are presented which point up inequitable treatment. These social-issue examples serve to introduce the notion that arbitrarily selected differences in people may serve as an unrational basis for unequal treatment. The fact that, as Peters (1966, pp. 118-120) points out, unequal treatment may be fair in areas of life where there are relevant differences is not specifically dealt with. The emphasis rather is on rational, genuine, equal consideration on the grounds of the common denominator -- humanness. This means, to use Peters' (1966, p. 121) words, that "no one shall be

assumed, in advance of particular cases being considered, to have a claim to better treatment than another." An experiential exercise attempts to allow the student to personally feel arbitrary unfairness and see it in conflict with the caring theme introduced earlier. As in "caring," the feeling or affective dimension is crucial in developing the disposition to act in accordance with the principle. Modeling and case study exercises bring the abstraction down to the interpersonal application of "being fair." Examples of consideration of others as well as oneself are purposefully put in the context of daily life rather than dramatic historical issues such as Nazism. The fostering of internalization of the concept is begun during the definitional instruction, where the students are asked to recall personal experiences of unequal consideration in the sense of the definition.

In the six-step strategy which the students practice using in the program, "being fair" supplies both motivation and criteria in two of the steps. As was noted above in the discussion of caring, concern for the well-being of others is an important prerequisite to engagement in consideration. However, the strategy step Consider Self and Others also requires a belief that the others are equal to self in terms of that consideration, which leads the students to actually give equal consideration to all others. This, in turn, motivates the students to gather information about others as skillfully, and as objectively, as possible. However, equal consideration is not meant to mean abandonment of self to the interests of others. The strategy step also asks that the students be

fair to themselves -- to equally consider self and others. The self-knowledge gained in the first step of the strategy allows the individual to give him/herself the equal consideration with others which "being fair" requires.

The Judge step which follows the gathering of information in the consideration of self and others is the implementation of "being fair." In this step students are asked to decide if a proposed action is ethical. To make the decision it is necessary that the values and concerns of all involved be objectively considered and the action weighed for consequences. Actions that do not have mostly positive effects on self and all others involved are rejected at this point on the basis of not appearing to be fair and thus not being ethical. Great stress is laid on reviewing all the available information in an objective fashion in reaching a decision. If the student arbitrarily selects out information while making his/her decision for action, the student denies impartiality which Peters (1970, p. 41) has called the "most fundamental principle of all practical reasoning."

Action. Using their own problems, the students will have applied the methods taught in the process to reach the point of acting on an idea which they have judged to be ethical. It is at this point that the fourth component of the program is introduced. This component, "action," brings SEA to its particular unique position among moral education programs. To have reasoned with the best of intentions does not provide insight into the accuracy of the decision. Without "action" there can be no assessment of whether or not particular actions turn out to be "ethical" in

reality. Further, the entire decision-making process becomes what Coombs (in press, p. 27) terms an intellectual game if it is not always seen as a genuine process of deciding what to do.

When the students in the SEA program move from the Judge step to the Act step, they are asked to commit themselves to taking the action they decided is ethical. This commitment may require courage and perseverance. It presupposes an increasing sensitivity to concerns of others and a growing self-knowledge, both of which are gained in preceding steps and which operate to increase independent judgment. The initial practices of the strategy provide structured assessment of these growth features. It is the repeated use of the strategy which not only fosters internalization but also leads toward what Wilson calls KRAT, a combination of the ability to use the skills necessary to reach a decision with the motivation and resolution to actually act on the decision.

Acting, however, does not complete the "action" process. The desired growth as an ethical actor requires that a student assess his or her actions. Therefore, in the sixth step, Evaluate, the program asks the students to examine the actions they have completed. Was the act ethical? Or did it have negative consequences which had not been considered? Was the act consistent with particular self-held values? Or did it perhaps reveal a new perception of those values? In retrospect, did the action reflect a fair consideration of everyone involved? These evaluative activities taught in the last step of the strategy provide a means for the student to develop principles consistent with ethicality. Repeated use

of these activities, however, is necessary for principle formation. It has been said that it takes a number of decisions and revisions and abandonment of actions in the face of experience before a person can be said to have formulated a principle (Hall and Davis, 1975, pp. 61-62).

Anticipated Outcomes of the Skills for Ethical Action Program

Thus far in the examination of Skills for Ethical Action's development, the theoretical and instructional aspects of the program have been considered. Another important developmental factor has been the ongoing tryouts of the SEA materials with students in actual classroom situations. Information gathered from each tryout has been used to guide further revision of the program. Currently the SEA materials are being used in a hands-off pilot study in twelve seventh, eighth, and ninth-grade classes in the Philadelphia area. Data from this study will not be available until late in 1977; data gathered from earlier tryouts, however, give some indications of the outcomes that may be anticipated from the use of the SEA materials. After completing an earlier version of the program, about half the students volunteered as characteristics they "most admire and respect in people" at least one of the course-given themes of personal autonomy, caring for others, and being fair. Also, 80 percent of the students reported a gain in knowledge about themselves, and 60 percent indicated that they had learned about the importance of and methods for considering others before acting. In addition, teachers have reported that they noticed a positive change in their students in both interpersonal and intraclass relationships.

It is expected that use of the SEA materials will lead to increased belief in internal locus of control in moral issues; an increase in the attribution of positive characteristics to others; an increase in personal preference for a reflective, rather than an impulsive, style; a greater consistency between actions and self-expressed values; and an increased sensitivity to ethical issues. These anticipated general effects of the program are being measured in the current study.

These outcomes seem directly related to the present-day conception of morality as outlined at the beginning of this paper: the concept of the morally autonomous person who is responsible for his or her own actions and whose actions are based on a rational consideration of the interests of others. Only later observation will tell just how much effect the SEA program may have in promoting the development of morally autonomous citizens. As one teacher pointed out, the total impact of the materials cannot be assessed immediately; there may be effects which will not appear for months or even years.

It is also true that no one-semester or even one-year course in moral education will provide sufficient input for total moral development. Programs in this domain must extend over many years of schooling (Fenton, 1977, p. 27). Therefore, the developers of the SEA materials do not see the program as the final answer to the schools' charge to morally educate their students. Rather, they regard it as an effort to provide instruction in one aspect of the broad field of moral education.

Questions Frequently Asked

It is hoped that this effort -- the SEA program -- will gain widespread acceptance as part of the schools' approach to moral education. In considering how such acceptance may be brought about, certain questions often arise. These include: What does use of the SEA materials require of the students, the teacher and the school? How might SEA fit into the school's general curriculum?

In response to the first question, it may be said that the students are required to have basic reading skills appropriate to their age level (12-14 years). This has been interpreted by the program developers as grade 5 reading level. Any words above this reading level which are necessary for instruction are defined and explained in context of the usage.

The materials have been developed through a succession of classroom tryouts. During each round of tryout, the instructional activities were closely monitored to ascertain the appropriateness for the age level; where it appeared they were not appropriate, revisions were made. To be appropriate, the majority of the students had to demonstrate an understanding of what they were being asked to do and the ability to perform the tasks as directed. Further, the outcome measures had to indicate that the activities enabled the students to achieve the lesson objectives at a reasonable level of mastery. It is believed that the materials as developed require no special abilities beyond those generally owned by the intended student user.

In regard to what is required of teachers using the SEA materials, it is necessary that they take sufficient time to carefully read over each lesson prior to its presentation. The teacher is also asked to use the program in its entirety rather than selecting portions of it, and to present the lessons in the sequence in which they are provided. But even more importantly, it is the responsibility of the teacher to develop a classroom climate that encourages openness, trust, and understanding -- one in which students feel free to voice their personal feelings and opinions, yet one in which personal privacy is respected and safeguarded.

Use of the SEA materials requires of the school the acceptance of and support for the exploration of personal values in matters which may be deeply felt and/or controversial. It should be noted, however, that the atmosphere of the school, its operational principles, and the ways in which administration, faculty and students are encouraged to interact -- all the aspects of what has been called the "hidden curriculum" -- have a profound effect on moral education (Etzioni, 1976, pp. 9-10; Purpel and Ryan, 1976, pp. 44-45). Therefore in order for SEA or any other program of moral education to have maximum impact on the students, the school should insofar as is possible put into daily operation the principles on which morality is based. It should support by practice as well as by precept the goals of autonomy, concern for human rights, and fairness.

The final question concerning how SEA might fit into the school's general curriculum is not easily resolved. Social science teachers who

have presented the SEA program see it as a good "fit" with study of family and community living. Language arts teachers find that course-taught skills such as role playing mesh with their programs and use the materials to foster listening, vocabulary and oral communication skills. The materials have also been used as a total program in guidance classes. These usages, however, came about primarily because of teacher and/or planner valuing of the course content. They do not signify a clear mandate for including programs such as SEA in the curriculum.

Some ways must be found to produce such a mandate. The desire of the public for moral education in the schools must be translated as a call to not bury the effort in traditional subject matter where academic goals may be emphasized to the extent that moral education goals are neglected, but instead to establish a place in the curriculum where the primary emphasis is on morally educating the students and where the content is focused on some aspect of moral instruction. Only then will the schools be able to fulfill the charge they have been given: to produce morally autonomous, responsible citizens capable of and motivated toward ethical action.

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